

Stories of  
Mt. VERNON

*Home of  
The Forest of Fame*



Centennial 1846-1946

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July 1946

Souvenir Booklet  
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In these pages I have **endeavored** to record interesting incidents, anecdotes, and **reminiscences** of the older citizens of Mt. Vernon as well as **some** of the colorful history that should be recorded and **kept for our** children.

## Introduction

This book was written by Mrs. Robert Pope, (Amelia Erfurth) of 438 West Mifflin Street, Madison, Wisconsin.

Here-in will be found many interesting stories of History brought up to date. Mr. Albert Barton gave me a story that he himself wrote on the history of Mt. Vernon. He told me to take from it whatever I wanted, but after reading it, I found it so interesting that I have added the complete story as you will find it in the pages of this book.

I spent my childhood days in Mt. Vernon and many are the memories that carry me back. I lived in the house by the church as a bride. My two children Irene (deceased) and Harold Johnson a Scout Executive at Green Bay, Wisconsin, were born in Mt. Vernon also. I have always been proud to say that Mt. Vernon was my birth place.

I wish to thank all who helped me in any way in gathering this history.





Birds-Eye View of Mt. Vernon, Wisconsin, taken in 1908

## AB INITIO

### Mt. Vernon - - 1846-1946

THE GEORGE PATCHIN family were the first settlers in this community. As wood and water were necessary for the existence of all pioneers, they built their home where these were available. Therefore they selected a spot near the "Big Spring" for their cabin. They had come from Ohio in 1846, driving all the way in a lumber wagon. The first white child born in Mt. Vernon, December 22, 1846 was David Patchin son of Mr. and Mrs. George Patchin.

In 1851 George Britts and his nephew Joel Britts bought the first plot of land in Mt. Vernon. They came here from Mt. Vernon Virginia and it was the Britts who named Mt. Vernon. Mr. Britts plotted the village and built the first saw mill in the town. It was surveyed by J. T. Berger and recorded in October 9, 1852. At that time Dr. P. Byam obtained possession of the village site and much of the adjoining land. The story of the Byam family has gone down through history told and retold from one generation to another. The Byam brothers were known as being tricky and dishonest. They were called land sharks and outlaws. After obtaining possession of the land around here they went to Brockland, N.Y. and sold property there at an enormous price. They took pictures with them showing a beautiful river running through the village of Mt. Vernon with a large steamboat on it. The noted Tilton Family, millionaires from N.Y., bought one block and part of another of city property for \$1200.00 without ever seeing it. This same property was sold later to an Eastern women for \$500.00. The dishonest practices of the Byams irritated the people of Mt. Vernon and surrounding farmers to the extent that the people decided to get rid of them. They got together about fifty in number with Dick Chandler as their chosen leader. On the evening agreed upon they went to Dr. Byams home armed with axes, crow-bars and other weapons. Mr. Chandler knocked at the door and was confronted by Mrs. Byam, who informed them that the Dr. was not at home, but the group of men were not easily bluffed and began tearing down the house. The Dr. opened an upstairs window and called out "if it weren't for the infant in the cradle here a half dozen of you would be lying down there dead." When the Dr. saw he could not frighten the men he came down and gave himself up. They took him across the road to the grist mill. Here



he was tried and found guilty of his dishonest transactions. Colonel Kelley pronounced the sentence, which was that Dr. Byam with his two brothers were to leave town in 24 hours. One of the brothers was tarred and feathered when he refused to leave town. This incident occurred on October 24th, 1859. Several days after this two of the brothers came back to get a load of hay. They went to the Tasher farm, loaded their hay, and were coming down the mill hill when some of the boys set fire to the hay. They wanted the Byams to know they meant business when they told them to leave town and never to return. The team ran away and was badly burned and the men ran too as fast as they could and as far as is known they never returned. Of course, the Byam brothers brought suit against the men a few of whom are as follows. There was Colonel Kelly, R. B. Chandler, Hall C. Chandler, J. T. Chandler, H. M. LaFollette, Wm. LaFollette, Joseph A. Bell, Peter Bell, Joseph A. Britts, Wm. W. Minor, David Ash, George H. Orr, Dean Eastman, Eliphalit Thomas and many more whose names don't seem to be recorded. J. C. Hopkins was acting attorney for the Byams and Johnson, Rollins, Smith, Keyes and Gay was the attorney for the defendants. The case ended in complete acquittal for the defendants, but they had to pay the Court Costs which amounted to \$78.26.

The Byams also defrauded many people by means of selling patent rights on churns and buggy springs.

George Britts built the first house in the village of Mt. Vernon. It was a log house and was built on the Brader farm now owned by Jens Shelstad. This log building was used until 1880 when Mr. Brader built the house that stands there now. The old log building was used as a wood shed for many years.

I found a very interesting story in history told by Mr. George Patchin on cabin building. He tells of how when a new settler arrived they would all get together and help him build his cabin. He said it only took four good men to lay up the logs. One man stood on each corner of the building with an ax to flatten and fit the ends of the logs. A cabin could be built in one day. He said after the raising they had considerable fun in one way or another and if circumstances were favorable they would have a lunch, which usually consisted of corn bread and venison.

Ox teams were used to break the land as few of the early settlers owned horses, usually 7 yoke of oxen would be hitched on an immense breaking plow which would turn under all stumps and underbrush except the very largest. At times the plow would become so firmly wedged in a stump that the oxen would have to be taken back and hitched on to draw the plow out. At night the oxen were turned loose to feed at large, if any of the animals were considered too wild, they would be yoked together in twos. In those times professional sod breakers would take a team of oxen and break them for the farmers. The oxen breakers secured

the services of the oxen for the season to pay for breaking them.

Then came the pioneer methods of farming. The grain was first sown by scattering the seed by hand, then at harvest time it was cut with a heavy cradle and bound by hand. Then oxen were used to prepare a hard, smooth, circular tract. Two rows of bundles would be layed top to top on this hard track, then oxen would be hitched to poles fasened at the center and driven round and round until the grain was treaded out, the straw would then be forked away, the grain, chaff and dirt gathered up and the process repeated, this was usually done on a windy day and as the grain was tossed up much of the chaff and dirt would blow away. Later on came the most curious machine—the old fanning mill. My what an improvement that was in cleaning the grain. W. W. Patchen says he used to help bind the grain behind the cradle. Mr. Patchen says (quote) "David Thomas was a good binder but I followed the cradle like Peter followed his Lord—a good way off." Another method of thrashing the grain came with the flaile. My brother, Mr. H. C. Erfurth, has in his possession my grandfather's cradle and flaile. Grain was thrashed then by placing the grain bundles on a wood floor and hammering out the grain with the flaile. I also remember my fathers fanning mill. Frank Moore told me how he and his brother Will Moore thrashed for the farmers with horse power; then came the steam engine. Mr. Moore says the longest thrashing season he remembers was 92 days. Many hard-



Above is one of the stores built in Mt. Vernon as it appeared in 1923. It served throughout the history of the village as a combination postoffice and general store. It burned down later. The first store was built by Patrick Corr in 1848.

(Courtesy, The Capital Times)



ships were endured even in those days as the men had to stay where ever they were thrashing among the farmers, and had to sleep in barns and sheds with their overcoats on in order to keep warm.

Mt. Vernon became a rapidly growing little village. In 1852 there were only 12 families. In 1880 there were 100 inhabitants. In 1849 George Britts built the first and only saw mill. Lumber was sawed at this mill to build most of the first houses in this community. Frank Moore says his Father built the house on the old homestead from one large log sawed at Britts Mill. Hall C. Chandler built the first general store. John Jones Sr., the first Hotel. It stood where the Kollith garage now stands. John Dick had the first shoe makers shop. It stood where Rodney Kollith house stands.

Major Abbot had the first Blacksmith shop it stood where Herman Erfurth's slaughter house now stands. At one time Mt. Vernon had four taverns. Dr. Donald was the first practicing physician. Mose Way had the first restaurant. Then there has always been the grist mill. At one time a cheese factory, a creamery, a lime kiln and a brick yard.

P. E. Call had a harness shop and also made saddles. Clark Lewis and John Korner were carpenters in Mt. Vernon and surrounding country. Stephen Foye and sons, Carl Neihus, and Carl Erfurth did the mason work. Carl Bieri made Swiss cow bells.

Ray Morris at one time had a store where Andy Nelson now has a business.

Litheuser had a general store on the corner where Rodney Kollith lives.

Otto Sundquist was also a carpenter. His favorite expression was, "Have a good time while you live boys, for when you die you are a long time dead."

Frank Coward had a shoe shop in the house that stood where Rodney Kollaths home now stands. He could make shoes almost as fine as the "boughten" ones.

Gust Huebbe had a harness making shop in the lowest flat of the three story building known as the Erickson home. Mr. Erickson operated a shoe makers shop in the same place years ago. Jim Smith once had a store in part of the building occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Herman Hankel. Jim Smith's son has a store in Jintown.

Warren Chandler was a stock buyer.

Doctors who have served Mt. Vernon in years past are, Dr. Donald, Kelly, McPeak, Dr. Lewis (who had one arm amputated). The first Dr. Sharpe, Dr. Osborne, who came from the west. He did not like the steepness of the hills and declared that it was necessary to hang to the back of the buggy to prevent it from tipping over onto the horses backs when traveling down the hills. He lived and had his office with Mr. and Mrs. John Korner.



Dr. Sweat and Dr. Sowle lived in the house now owned by Arthur Moore.

Dr. and Mrs. Stebbins came here as a bride and groom. Dr. H. A. Sharpe came here as a graduate to begin his practice. He lived in the Minor house and had his office there. He boarded for a time with Mr. and Mrs. Carl Erfurth. Then he took a wife, a young bride from the city of Chicago. Coming to a country home where she had to cook on a wood stove and carry water in a pail was a great hardship for Mrs. Sharpe because she had been used to having gas and running water. But we all think of her as a capable, courageous, and a wonderful help mate and companion. Mrs. Sharpe now resides in Verona. The passing of Dr. Sharpe on January 20, 1940 was a shock to the people for many miles around as he had served us long and well. To me, as well as to all he served, he was considered a wonderful doctor.

Dr. Evans also administered to the families in this area in true country doctor tradition as did all of Mt. Vernon doctors.

In 1891, Tom Everill printed a newspaper called the Mt. Vernon Enterprise.

The Mt. Vernon Telephone Company was organized in 1900.

Mr. John Shettler Sr. was the first to sign a petition drawn up by the town chairman John Bang in about 1890. John Bang was the father of the Bang brothers of Mt. Horeb. Mr. Bang's daughter worked in the hotel and disliked the old saloons. She told her father if he didn't do something about riding the village of its saloons he was not worthy of the title father. So Mr. Bang circulated a petition and at the spring election Mt. Vernon was voted dry.

The first grist mill was built by Ed Britts and Charley Smith in 1858. The first mill had ponderous wooden wheels and was a resort in its day. In the early eighties the wooden wheels were replaced with a turbine water wheel. When C. W. Karn took over the mill he added many improvements. In 1887 while in possession of Nick Hentgen the mill was burned to the ground. At one time the mill was a political and social center where all exchanged their ideas while waiting for their grists. At times as many as twenty teams and wagons would be there waiting for their grist. In 1887 Mr. Hentgen, then the miller, called all the farmers together to clean out the mill race. In the evening a dance was held in the mill. Liquor flowed freely, this resulted in a fight. A husky fellow called Big Holvor threw several of his contestants into the mill race. George Orr built the mill as it now stands. It has changed hands many times, the Koch brothers having it for many years. The last transaction was from Fred and Ferdinand Koch to Herbert Hankel.

Millers of the past: John Jones, Isaac Brader, C. W. Karn, Wm. Koch and sons bought the mill in 1897.

The Koch family are well known and were in business here in Mt. Vernon for many years. Amel, August and Herbert had a general store and also sold farm equipment. Fred and Ferdinand were in partnership in the Mill. In July, 1912 the store and machine shop burned to the ground but was rebuilt. Amel and August are deceased. Herbert carried on the store business until a few years ago when he sold the business to Andy Nelson who is the only merchant in Mt. Vernon now. The machine shop was turned into a garage in later years and is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Eggeman who operate a tavern and auto repair shop. The Chandler brothers, Will and Bert, were also merchants in Mt. Vernon for many years. Will now lives in Middleton and Bert in Aberdeen S. Dakota.

Mrs. Carnelius Sorenson says she remembers when she was a girl, her Aunt, Mrs. Stamm, used to give her eggs to take to town to buy candy with. She says she always liked to have Bert wait on her because he gave her the biggest sack of candy. This store also burned while occupied by Sinako brothers of Madison and was never rebuilt.

### MT. VERNON CHURCHES

The Baptist church was organized July 26, 1869 with about sixty members. The first pastor was Rev. George Martin. To supplement the salary he received as pastor he sold sewing machines. The second pastor was Rev. L. Smith. Services were first held in the school house. The present church building was erected in 1869 at an expense of \$3,500.00. The land was bought from Isaac G. Brader and his wife, Joanna. The church was dedicated on November 10, 1869. At this first service, the bell, which had been brought from Milwaukee with a team and wagon, rang out through the valley. It was truly the "Little white church in the vale." The Rev. Fish of Fox Lake, Wisconsin opened the dedicatory services by reading the 84th and 87th Psalms. Prayer was offered by Rev. Dodge of Madison. The text was read from the 8th chapter of Mark, verses 36 and 37. The collection amounted to three hundred forty-five dollars and twenty-five cents. A collection was taken for home missions which amounted to eleven dollars and sixty-five cents. Different means were taken to raise money to pay off the church debt. An oyster supper was served at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Orr, although the evening was stormy, a good crowd turned out for the services and \$5.32 was raised. The final payment soon was made and the church debt paid, with much rejoicing among its members.

Rev. Sprague was the first minister to serve the congregation in their new building. The first communion was given on December 7, 1870. From 1877 to 1888 very few meetings were held in the church and in 1888 the church was reorganized by Elder





**The Mt. Vernon Baptist church, shown above, was erected in 1869. The church is now occasionally used for special services and is open once a year for annual celebrations. The church, closed from 1877 to 1888, does not now have a permanent pastor. Part of the Mt. Vernon centennial celebration will take place in this historic building.**

(Courtesy, The Capital Times)

Lincoln and many of the old members were restored to membership at that time. It was decided to raise the building and build a stone foundation and install a furnace. My father, Mr. Carl Er-furth and Stephen Foye built the basement wall. Thirteen new members entered the church through baptism on December 23, 1888, on the icy waters of the Sugar River. Two more members were baptized on March 30, 1889.

At an early day several of the followers of the Jos. Smith, Normans, were accustomed to preach and baptize in the river. The story goes that the excitement at these services was equal to any fair, and people gathered from far and wide to witness these services. At one time, a wicked Gentile forced a poor unfortunate dog into the river. The dog was seized by an excited saint and devoutly immersed. This poor dog was known as a heathen converted into Christianity forever after.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Moore were the only couple ever married in the church.

The bible which has always been used was donated by Isaac Brader and is still kept in the church building.





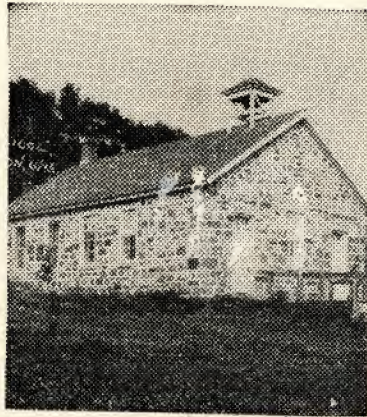
The members of the Mt. Vernon Baptist church Ladies Aid society met once a year to be photographed. Shown above is a picture taken either in late 1890s or early 1900s, according to Mrs. Ralph Davis who owns the picture. The members of the group were identified as follows: Front row—left to right: Hannah Foy, Mrs. Donald Jones, Mrs. Luella Lust with baby George Webber in lap; Mrs. Lizzie Jones, Amelia Karn, Mrs. C. W. Karn, Mrs. John Schettler, Mrs. Pat Way, Lottie Way with baby, unidentified visitor sitting behind the boy, Alvie Lust; Mrs. Andrew Peterson with unidentified girl; Mrs. Julia Burmeister, with unidentified baby; William Lust holding Eddie Lust in his lap. Second row: Pauline Lust Foy, Mrs. Dell Korner Erfuth, Lydia Lust Davis, Margaret Lewis, Mary Karn, Susan Weltzing, two unidentified women, Mary Allen, Alice Rae, Carrie Moore, Oscar Lust. Third row: William Rae, Richard Lust, John Jones, Henry Webber, Louis Lust Koch, Mr. Erickson, Mrs. Marshall Abbott, Clark Lewis, Andrew Peterson, Stephen Foy, C. W. Karn, and an unidentified man. (Courtesy, The Capital Times)



An interesting story is told that at the time of the Chicago fire, carpenters, including Mr. Jesse Meyers of Verona, were working on the church building. When the news was brought about the disaster, these carpenters rode through the country spreading the news and gathering provisions to be sent to the victims.

Several ministers served the congregation through the years including, Rev's Martin, Elder Lincoln (who worked during the week with John Korner as a carpenter) Rev's Higby, Elwood, Sprague, Caine, Finch, Jett, Gulick, Duff, Nickerson, and Elsom.

On a business meeting held on January 3, 1913, it was decided to invite the Swiss Reformed Congregation to use the church building as long as necessary. In 1914 the Swiss Reformed church was built and has served the spiritual needs of the community since. The baptist church has been closed except for funeral services of former members and friends and a welcome homecoming service held the first Sunday in June of each year.



The second school house built in Mt. Vernon is pictured above. The stone structure replaced a frame building in 1866. The original school was built in 1851. The photograph was made in 1908. The building here was replaced with a new frame building in 1910.

(Courtesy, The Capital Times)



## MT. VERNON'S SCHOOLS

The first school house was built in 1851. It was a frame building and when the stone school house was built in 1866 the first school house was used as a wood shed. When I went to school in the stone building, I well remember helping to carry cord wood from this wood shed into a huge wood box that stood in the entry of the old school house. The school was heated at that time by a large round stove that was nearly as tall as the school room. I said nearly and it held a full length cord wood stick. At a meeting held in 1887 a new school house was discussed. A motion was made to build a new school house but the motion was lost. In July 18, 1910 a motion was again made to build, this time thirty-eight votes were cast, twenty-four in favor and fourteen against. The question of changing from a district school to a graded school was brought up, thirty-two votes were cast, twenty-three in favor of making the change and nine against it. They also voted on raising five thousand dollars as a building fund, thirty-four votes were cast, twenty-eight in favor and six against. Dr. H. A. Sharpe and S. E. Foye were appointed as a building committee to act with the school board. Ed Pierce was clerk and was instructed to procure building plans from the state superintendent. The mason work was left to Charles Erfurth and Mr. S. E. Foye. The contract for the building was let to Kleven Bros.

The well at the school was drilled in 1898. In 1872 wood was bought from Joseph Pierce for one dollar and sixty cents a cord delivered. Twenty-eight dollars was raised to pay for the wood. In 1873 Byron Pierce got the bid for wood at a dollar seventy-five cents a cord delivered. In 1912 it was voted to plant four shade trees on the school grounds. In 1913 two odd votes were cast at the school meeting, one for George Washington and one for Abraham Lincoln. The oldest records I could find for teachers wages was in 1871, one hundred and fifty dollars was paid for the nine months of school. From that time until 1946, just 75 years ago, wages have increased considerably. The teacher that has been hired for the 1947 school term will be paid two thousand and twenty-five dollars for the nine month period. In 1887 a motion was made to fence in the entire school grounds but this motion was lost. In 1895 a broom was bought for twenty-five cents. One dollar was paid for cleaning the school house. The flag pole was raised in 1890 at the cost of one dollar and a half, the flag cost two dollars. Five gallons of mixed paint was bought in 1890 to paint the school house and the wood shed at the cost of seven dollars. In 1875 a motion was made to have ten months of school, this motion was also lost. In 1890 two bids were put in to shingle the school house, John Korner's bid was fifty-six dollars and Clark Lewis's bid was sixty dollars. The contract was let to Mr. Korner.

## **THE MT. VERNON SINGING SCHOOL**

Mt. Vernon also had a singing school, which was held in the Baptist Church. Ben Rogers was the teacher. Oscar Lust tells us the story of the balking team of ponies the singing teacher drove. Oscar says he used to try various methods to start them. Sometimes he would sing as loudly as he could. When mud was available he put mud in their mouth. One time he built a fire under them and the ponies moved far enough ahead to draw the buggy over the fire and the buggy burned up. Spelling schools were also a delight in earlier days. They would all pile into a big bob-sled or two and go to these spelling bees, after the spelling was over they would play games and speak pieces. Then they would go home with sleigh bells jingling and sometimes the young men folks would escort their lady friends home on foot through fields and over the hills. On a bright moon light winter night the songs and shouts rang out through the wooded forests.

Miss Bernice Moore, daughter of Aurthur Moore, is now our beloved music teacher. She is ever ready to help out when ever music or singing talent is needed.

Mr. John Eichelkraut and son Marvin also are talented musicians and no program is complete without their presence. We all like to dance to their music.

## **THE MT. VERNON CEMETERY**

A group of Mt. Vernon people met at the school house on July 19, 1858 for the purpose of talking over the possibilities of buying land for a cemetery. An association was formed and named the Mt. Vernon Cemetery Association. Stephen Fairbanks was chosen chairman, Henry Allen, Secretary, and three trustees were chosen by ballot. They were John Jones for the term of three years, Henry Allen, two years, and Stephen Fairbanks for one year. On September 26, 1859 the association met and moved to circulate a subscription paper. Money was raised by subscription and land was purchased from Mr. and Mrs. Robbins, they received fifteen dollars for the northern part and the southern part was bought from Mr. and Mrs. John Jones Senior for the same amount. The land was cleared and fenced with a good substantial board fence, which stood until the fall of 1878 when the new fence was built. The price of the lots were as follows. The first tier of the lots on each side of the main alley was to be sold for three dollars. The second tier for the amount of two and one half dollars and the third tier for two dollars, the fourth tier, one and a half and the fifth one dollar also giving the board power to donate to poor persons or strangers such lot or lots as would be necessary. In 1878 a new fence was built, flat pickets were used for the front of the fence, boards for the other sides. All who



could were to furnish cedar posts, a bee was held and the old fence torn down, and the new one was built. Mr. John Korner was hired to make the gates. Mable Korner Davis and myself went through the cemetery taking dates from the old tombstones, the bodies of many of our loved ones have been layed away to rest there. The oldest marked stone was that of Francis Curtis, age one year, son of M. L. and T. A. Curtis, the date read 1849. We found the graves of twin sons of James Smith. One had passed away in September 1871 at the age of one year. The other passed away in October 1872 age of two years. We found this inscription on an old stone:

Remember friends as you pass by  
As you are now so once was I.  
As I am now you soon shall be  
So all prepare to follow me.

The arch over the gateway of the cemetery as it now stands was bought by the Willing Workers Society of Mt. Vernon whose members were as follows: Alpha Brader, Ella and Amelia Karn, Nelly, Mable, and Viola Beard, Gyda Murkue, Marion Colby, Ethel Chandler, Hazel and Lola Harker, Elsie Koch, Mable, Corrella and Geneva Moore, and Ella Spaanum. Members who have since passed away were Retta Foye, Clara Olson, Clara Kittleson and Clara Koch.

(If any names have been omitted, I hope I will be forgiven as it was not done intentionally.)

The fence that is now standing was donated by the Ladies Aid Society of the Mt. Vernon Baptist church.

### MT. VERNON BAND

The band was organized in September 16, 1891. The instruments were received October 9, 1891. It was voted that each member pay sixteen dollars and fifty cents into the treasury to pay for the instruments and the other expenses. The following were the members responsible for the organization: H. B. Fargo, J. F. Weltzin, E. F. Burmester, P. N. Mason, K. K. Boe, C. A. Brader, H. Hankle, T. A. Everill, R. Lust, J. S. McPherson, John Korner, D. J. Smith, W. Kollath, F. Allen and J. S. Donald.

According to the minutes of the first meeting the money was to be paid to the treasure before purchasing the instruments. The first officers were E. F. Burmister, President, H. B. Fargo, Vice President, J. F. Weltzing, Secretary, and R. Lust, Treasure. It was named and known as the Mt. Vernon Cornet Band. One of the by-laws read that any member being late for the meetings was to be fined one cent a minute unllss he could give a very good reason for his being late. More names were added to the list later as follows: F. G. Moore, E. C. Pierce, Alvah Webber, Henry Mitchell, and Fred Allen.



Shown above are members of the Mt. Vernon Cornet band which was founded in the early 1890s. The photograph was made in the early part of the nineties decade and shows the following musicians. The man with the drum is August Koch and with the baton is George Pierce. The others are second row, left to right, Ray Morris, Sid Foy, Oscar Lust, John Korner, and Knute Boe. Top row includes Henry Mitchell, Charles Brader, John Harker, Emil Koch, and Herman Hankel. Five of the members, the two Kochs, Pierce, Korner and Boe, are deceased.

(Courtesy, The Capital Times)



## **MT. VERNON'S BASE BALL TEAM**

In 1906 Mt. Vernon had a famous base ball team consisting of Johnny Wilson, Andrew Brink, Earl Fritz, George Brader, Dr. Deno O'Conner (deceased) Garhardt Stamm, Tom Wilson, Isaac Spaanum, and Grover Wilson better known as "Dugan". M. R. V. was the lettering on their shirts, meaning the Mt. Vernon Red Valley team. These boys were hard hitters and were known as a team hard to beat. All the boys except Dr. Deno O'Conner are still living.

## **THE FIRST CHARIVARI**

The first charivari took place in Primrose when Mr. Joel Smith was married the second time. Mr. Patchin tells of losing his powder horn at the charivari and getting up early the next morning to recover it before Mr. Smith found it.

## **THE SADDEST TRAGEDY**

One of the most tragic happenings that Mt. Vernon ever experienced was the drowning of Ida Van Norman and Alex Osborne. This story was told to me by Grandma Dell Korner Erfurth, who witnessed the tragedy. On May 7th, 1878 seven of the young folks of the school hurriedly ate their noon lunch, some of them sitting in the deep windows of the old school building. Teacher, Gerge Martin, had gone home for dinner. When they had finished their lunch, they decided to go to the mill pond for a boat ride. The boat was flat bottomed, old and dilapidated; but none of them realized the danger even though they had been forbidden to use the boat. Carrie McCord, Ida Van Norman, Lottie Way, Charley Allen Jr. and Dell Foye (Mrs. Erfurth) went out leaving Alta McCord and Alex Osborne watching from the shore. When the boys began to rock the boat, Dell became frightened and asked to be taken to the shore. Alex helped her out of the boat and she in turn helped him into her place. She stood beside Alta and watched the rest of the young folks row out to the deepest part of the pond. It seemed that without warning the boat tipped, spilling its occupants into the water. The children on the shore ran to the Allen Hotel screaming for help. Charley Allen Sr. had just returned from the post office. He was sitting on the Hotel steps looking at the saloon license that he had just received. He ran to the water's edge and jumped into the water unmindful of the heavy boots he was wearing. The children were all clinging to the overturned boat; but when Mr. Allen reached them they all turned to him and their grasping hands carried him under the water with them. Ida was clinging to his leg and it was necessary for him to push her away with his foot. The mark of his boot was left on her face. Help began to arrive. Mr. Peterson and Mr.



Erickson attempted to wade from the North side of the pond but were forced to turn back as neither could swim. Dr. Donald arrived and revived the first one to be brought in, which was Carrie McCord. Charley Allen Jr. managed to right the boat and rescued himself and Lottie Way; but Alex and Ida had gone down and their bodies could not be found. The girl's sunbonnets were floating on the surface of the water. It took one-half hour before the body of Alex was recovered and longer to recover that of Ida. The bodies were carried to the hotel and wrapped in blankets and everything done to revive them, but to no avail. Ida's father offered Dr. Donald his farm and all his possessions if only he could save her. Ida was buried in a pink silk dress that she had been wanting, and was laid to rest in the Mt. Vernon Cemetery. Alex was buried in Oregon. Ida was sixteen years of age and Alex was fourteen.

The news of the tragedy was carried to the family and friends by men on horseback. The Van Normans lived across the road from where the Edwin Oimoens now live. The Osbornes lived on what is now the farm owned by John Eichelkraut. This was not the end of trouble for the Osbornes for just sixteen days later a tornado passed through Primrose and Mrs. Osborne had one leg broken in two places and the knee of the other seriously injured. Another daughter so badly injured she was not able to walk for three months. Mr. Osborne was also slightly injured.

### THE WORST CRIME

Two Mt. Vernon citizens, William and George Rea were the means of uncovering the worst crime that was ever committed in Primrose—the murder of a cheesemaker, William Christen. He was murdered on December 12, 1888 in the Holland Cheese factory. This factory was always known as the murder factory. John Kuehni, a young man twenty-five years old had come from Switzerland and had been in this country about fourteen months, was known to be a desperado and had served a prison term in Switzerland. Mr. Christen was an unmarried man thirty years old. He had been paid his summer wages which amounted to around four hundred dollars. Johnny Kuehni planned to rob Mr. Christen and make his escape back to Switzerland but a quarrel took place and Mr. Christen was murdered in cold blood. Nine days later on December 21, 1888 George and William Rea were fishing in the river, which run just below the Holland cheese factory. About ninety rods east of the factory the water was clear and bright. The Rea brothers noticed an old grain bag weighted to the bottom with something in it. Bill said to George "Looks like there might be a jug in it, let's pull it out". They pulled it out with a fish pole, but on opening it found a large stone, a pair of wooden shoes, and to their horror and amazement a human head, liver and the intestines. N. N. Byrge was sent for and immediately identified

the head as that of William Christen. Sheriff Estes was sent for and the next morning Justice Ole Barton empanelled a corners jury, consisting of John Tasher, G. Anonson, Mike Hobbs, Eli Peterson, Peter O. Baker, K. P. Myrland. They met in the said factory and fixed the murder at once on Kuehni. But Kuehni was not to be found. No time was lost in the search for him and he was traced to Monroe, Wisconsin, thence to Philadelphia from there he had taken passage on the American Line steamer bound for Switzerland. A cablegram was sent on ahead and he was arrested by a London detective immediately upon his arrival in England, December 29. Sheriff Estes crossed the water in pursuit and on February 22, he was lodged in the Dane County Jail. Kuehni confessed that he had struck and killed Mr. Christen with a stick of wood while he was in bed. He told how he hung cheese cloth over the factory window and then carried the body to the cellar where he cut it up with an ax. He burned part of the body on the cellar floor and burried a part of it in a neighboring grove. The murderer in his confession told what a good friend Mr. Christen had been to him. He said they enjoyed their drinks together and often went hunting. Kuehni was sent to Waupun for life.

### THE COURT TRIAL WITH ODD TESTIMONIES

A court trial held in Alva Stewart's office in Mt. Vernon in 1882. Taken from court records. This was the trial of W. W. Minor and the town board in regards to the road running down past the old Minor place now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Moore. W. W. Minor came to Mt. Vernon in 1857 after he had served through the Civil War and was badly wounded. In 1866 he bought block eight from Sanford Shumway. In 1877 he built a barn near the creek and in 1878 he built the house. The argument was that of the location of the road.

Many odd testimonies were given. Evan Jones testified that he had lived near Mt. Vernon for thirty five years and that he had traveled over the road in 1844. I. G. Brader said he was born in England in 1819 and came to Mt. Vernon in 1855. He had hauled wood over the road in early days. John L. Malone said he had lived in Springdale thirty six years. George Moore said he was born in York state and came to Mt. Vernon in 1853. He worked in the old saw mill. Stephen Foye said he came to Mt. Vernon in 1856 and that the road was then where the Minor porch was. William Lust testified that he came here thirty years ago at the age of eight years and that in 1868 he graded the road below the Minor house. He said the road run below the school house. Clark Lewis said he came here thirty years ago and that when the Minor's built their house, the stone and lumber pushed the road down the hill. Charles Lewis said at one time the road run above the Minor house. John T. Chandler said he had moved a



barn for Minor from the village. Byron Minor, age thirty-two said until the survey of 1867 the road had been above the Minor house.

The hill behind the school house was known as "Stony Point". It is said in wet weather they traveled above the school house and in dry weather below the school house. Much of the stone used to build the Minor house was taken from the hill back of the house. Earlier settlers say that at one time the school house door opened on the upper hill side and the pupils went out that way to the main road. After the I. G. Brader house was built travel was below the school as it is now.

Mr. Wm. Minor even sought to fence off the road. Claiming it had no legal existence.

James P. McPherson famous justice of the peace of western Dane county who lived on the Verona road gave the most interesting testimony.

### AN EXPERIENCE OF OLDEN DAYS

Mr. George Moore, father of Will and Frank Moore bought the old homestead from the government. He walked to Mineral Point to get the deed for the farm. This farm has always stayed in the Moore family and is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Gerhard Stamm. Mr. Frank Moore tells of the experience his folks had years ago with a jail breaker named John Ross. Mr. George Moore had left the house at 4:00 o'clock in the morning to take a load of cord wood to Madison. The jail breaker had followed the wagon tracks to the Moore farm and approached Mrs. Moore by telling her that her husband's team had ran away and that her husband was badly injured and that he was not expected to live. He told her he had been sent to tell her to come to the Nimmo farm (now known as the Jenni farm) as quickly as possible. Will Hale was in the field near by and he was called and took Mrs. Moore to the place mentioned at once. On arrival she found that the story was false. In the meantime Mr. Ross asked William Moore, the oldest of the Moore family, where Mr. Moore kept his money. Will told him in the bible. So the outlaw went through the bible but found no money so he ransacked the house and finding a new over-coat of Mr. Moore's took it as well as all the rest of his clothes and went to the woods near by and changed his clothes. After being dressed in new clothes he walked to Mt. Vernon. He went up over the mill hill there he stopped Holver Johnson's daughter as she was on her way home from Mt. Vernon. He robbed her of all her groceries and then went to the grain field and hid. The Johnsons lived on the Goustead farm. Mr. Holver Johnson, John Johnson, Jim Arnold, Isaac Brader, Charley Allen, all went armed with rifles and guns in search of the outlaw. Some movers along the road noticed a trail through the grain field and in following that they found the man. He was surrounded

and captured. The men named brought him to Mt. Vernon. Jim Arnold secured a rope and was about to hang him when the sheriff arrived from Madison and took charge of him. A reward of fifty dollars was offered for his capture but the men never did receive the reward, as far as is known the sheriff received the reward.

## EARLY SETTLERS

Many of the earliest settlers bought their farms from the Government. Adam Lust came here from Germany in 1851 with a large family. The voyage across the ocean was made in a sail boat. They landed in Milwaukee, Wis. and came by team to Mt. Vernon. They cleared the land and built a house and blacksmith shop. Mr. Lust being a blacksmith by trade. The story is told that Mr. Lust walked to Belmont (then the capitol of Wis.) to get the deed to his farm. It so happened that the U.S. President was going through Belmont at that time and signed Mr. Lust's deed.

Mr. John Kollath also bought land from the Government. A team of oxen was used to break this land. This farm has always stayed in the Kollath family and is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kollath son of Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Kollath of Mt. Vernon.

Henry Kried, father of Herman Kried of Madison came here in 1847 and bought the farm now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Dave Brink.

Tom Jones was known as a real estate dealer in Mt. Vernon and owner of a large amount of property. It is said at one time that he paid the highest taxes in the community.

Mable Davis says her first recollections of Mt. Vernon was Tom Jones' Braying mules.

Unique distinctions lent interest to other families of the area. There was the Webber family, for instance. Marlin Cleveland Webber was a first cousin of President Grover Cleveland, but the hard-headed M. C. was wont to say: "That's no credit to either one of us." In the Webber family, grandfather, father and two sons served in the Civil war. George Webber was the youngest Wisconsin soldier in the war, his fine physique enabling him to get by under 14. And once when Truman Webber was carrying a wounded comrade off the field the southern soldiers ceased firing and applauded his courage.

E. C. Pierce, was a man well known in this community. He was clerk of the Mt. Vernon school for many years and always showed a deep interest in the welfare of the teachers and pupils. He was also town clerk of Primrose for 24 years. On Sept. 20, 1927, several hundred people from Primrose, Springdale, Madison and surrounding country gathered at his farm in the town of Primrose near Mt. Vernon to pay their respects to Mr. Pierce. He passed away Dec. 18, 1931.



## THE FIRST SWISS SETTLERS

The first swiss settlers that moved here were Mr. and Mrs. John Tasher, (parents of Warren Tasher now of Verona and known as one of the best farmers in Dane County). They bought from the government the farm now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. John Rhiner. Mrs. Rhiner, Eva, is a twin daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Warren Tasher. Her twin sister, Iva, is Mrs. Edwin Omion who lives neighbors on the old Van Norman farm. The first swiss cheese that was made in this community was made in the cellar of the Tasher home. Mrs. John Tasher was the cheesemaker. Mr. Tasher peddled the cheese in Madison. The first cheese factory was built in 1878. It was known as the Tasher factory and stood below the Tasher house. This building burned down some years ago. Thirteen cows supplied the milk to make the first cheese. The first pure bred holstein cattle imported into this community was brought here by John Tasher in 1884 and 1885. Soon after the Tashers came the Baltz Hefty family who bought the McPherson farm. Then came the Mathew Marty family. Their son, Minor Marty, is a respected citizen interested in the welfare of the village. Mr. and Mrs. Sam Wittwer made cheese in Mt. Vernon and later bought the Gousman farm now occupied by their son and his family, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Wittwer. Deitrich Freitag came here in 1866 and bought the farm that is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Willard Peters. Fred Erb bought the Everill farm and many more of the swiss families, of whom we are so proud, have settled here. It was these swiss families that started the dairy movement in this community and it has been followed so gallantly by their descendants.

## PIONEER WOMEN

I found a story in history of how our pioneer women spun their own yarn. I can remember how my mother would wash the wool in the winter and lay it on the snow to bleach it and to remove the oil. Then she would pick it apart by hand, then came the carding of the wool and the spinning of the yarn. I can remember seeing my mother sitting at the spinning wheel. She would dye the yarn in pretty colors and knit all of our stockings mittens, sweaters and hoods. In those days only black stockings were worn regardless of the color of the dress. Another story in history tells of how our mothers went to church wearing sun-bonnets, long white aprons with crocheted lace. (Some are on display at the church today as we celebrate this centennial.

## STORY TOLD BY MRS. SUSAN MARTY

Mrs. Marty says she and her husband lived in the old house by the big spring at the time it burned down. Mrs. Marty says



they had worked so hard in the field that day planting corn by hand. Their chores were done and Mrs. Marty had put the three oldest children to bed in the loft of the cabin and the hired man had also gone up there to sleep. His name was Albert Swefel. Mrs. Marty says he smoked a pipe and with the house banked with straw for the winter it was awful dry and as Mr. Swefel emptied his pipe out of the window the hot ashes set fire to the straw. The whole side of the house was on fire when she noticed it. The stairway was on that side of the house so she ran up the steps to get the children, their bed was already on fire and burning but she grabbed the three children and ran down the burning stairs. Mr. Marty had carried the baby outside and laid her on the mattress under a tree. Mrs. Marty says the hired man was only interested in saving his own belongings but found to his disappointment that he had saved a pair of Mr. Marty's shoes instead of his own. The Marty family was taken in by Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Foye who kept them for two weeks. Mrs. Marty says they were well fed and cared for and was never charged a cent. During that time the granary was fixed up and the family lived in it until the log house was built. Rose Marty was born in the grainery and Mrs. Marty says she milked fourteen cows the night Rosey was born. Mrs. Marty says she endured many hardships. She is still hale and hearty after bringing thirteen children into the world (all of whom she is very proud). She loaded eighty loads of hay one summer. There were twenty-one of her descendants served in World War 2 and there are one-hundred and eight kin folks in the immediate family. Mrs. Marty will be eighty-five years old in September. She is a very active woman, doing all her own house work and sometimes helping the neighbors. She has resided in Mt. Vernon the past thirty years.

## RECOLLECTIONS

Billings Lewis lived across the river from our now forest of fame and his daughter taught school in the Harker district. She walked from Mt. Vernon to the John Harker farm now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Laverne Johnson. School was held in the Harker home and it is said you could trail her in the dust from her home to the school. They really wore long skirts in those days.

\* \* \*

Jim Smith was the first man to bring mail to Mt. Vernon. He would leave Madison on one day, stopping off at Verona, and would return the next day to Madison. Mail was delivered three times a week. Mr. Smith usually made the trip on horse back but sometimes on week-ends he would travel in a two-wheeled cart so his sweetheart could ride with him.

\* \* \*

Told by Mr. John Harker—In 1851 Captain Cregg lived on the farm best known to the most of us as the Leonard Marty

farm, now owned by Herman Erfurth. He came here from Scotland. Mr. Harker says he bought whiskey by the barrel at twenty-five cents a gallon and he and his wife both enjoyed their drinks.

\* \* \*

At one time Mt. Vernon had a population of three hundred inhabitants. It sported two general stores, two blacksmith shops, a meat market, a hotel, a school, a barber shop, two farm implement shops, a livery stable, a church, a creamery, a restaurant, a harness shop, a shoe shop, a post office and two blind pigs, at one time a jewelry store and also a doctor. Rodney Kolleth says you'd have to count all the dogs and cats in the village to count three-hundred now.

\* \* \*

Frank Moore told a story about Mr. Alex. Clow, from way back when. He said Alex's mother sent him to town with three dozen eggs and was to return with tea in exchange. Tea cost twenty-five cents a pound and eggs were worth three cents a dozen, so when Master Clow was told he didn't have enough eggs for a pound of tea, he said, "Well give me two pounds then." Mrs. John Baker says she can remember when three rings of bologna could be bought for twenty-five cents and flour for seventy-five cents a sack (50 lbs.)

\* \* \*

On May 23, 1884 Ringling Brothers & Yankee Robinson pitched their tents on the Mt. Vernon Park grounds. The big wagons became stuck in the mud and the farmers had to use their teams to pull them out.

\* \* \*

John Swenson opened the first meat market in Mt. Vernon. He also peddled meat to the surrounding farmers. As he drove up to the farmers house he would ring a hand bell, the farmers wives would come to the wagon with a platter or pan and the meat would be weighed on a scale hanging from the back of the wagon. Some times the meat would be tenderized from the heat but Mr. Swenson never charged extra for that.

\* \* \*

Otto Hacker opened the first barber shop. He worked for Koch brothers in the general store and barbered one day and one night a week. His shop was in the building where Eli Kobber-vick now has his tavern.

\* \* \*

At one time Mt. Vernon had a brick yard. Arthur Byrge's house was built from bricks made in this brick yard. It is thought that Hall Chandler also built a house from these Mt. Vernon bricks.

\* \* \*

Dr. Donald built the house where Mr. and Mrs. Godfred Urban live and many will remember the old bell that hung in the cupola on the back part of the house. Mrs. Frank Moore says



that bell was rung the last time on November 11, 1918 when the Armistice was signed in World War 1. Mrs. Moore's mother who had lived in the house for many years rang the bell. I well remember that day, too, as I had the key to the Baptist Church in my possession and when the Armistice was signed I went to the church and rang the bell until my hands were blistered. Mrs. Corella Nadler finally came to help me. We were indeed all happy that the war was over.

\* \* \*

In times past most every farmer had a dinner bell, if these bells were rung any time except at meal time the neighbors knew it was a call for help. It meant fire, sickness, or death. Frank Moore says he rang the dinner bell for help when his father passed away very suddenly. Johnny Harker was the first neighbor to arrive.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Earnest Karn told me her grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Foye came to Mt. Vernon in a covered wagon and oxen all the way from Canada. They lived in the old house by the big spring.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Susan Marty says we even had a dentist in Mt. Vernon at one time. He was C. J. Weltzin and owned the general store and only pulled teeth as a side line. She walked from the big spring down to his store one day and was suffering with a terrible tooth-ache. She asked him to pull her tooth but she said he told her he only pulled teeth for men. She was very angry and went back home and pulled the tooth herself.

\* \* \*

When the false alarm was sounded that the war was over on November 8, 1918 Mary Lazars, teacher in the Mt. Vernon school, Mable Korner Davis, and my-self with several of the school children all so happy, gathered with tin pans, cow bells, and other noisy instruments and marched through Mt. Vernon to the rocks. We climbed to the top of the Mt. Vernon rocks and placed a large flag on a pole and the flag was there for many years.

\* \* \*

Gunof Tollefson tells what a hard time he had trying to get six dollars together to pay his taxes in 1848. He said he had two pigs and Hall Chandler had two wolf scalps, so he traded one pig to Mr. Chandler for his two wolf scalps. He walked to Madison, obtained the bounty for the scalps and paid his taxes. Robert Oliver bought one hundred sixty acres of land for twenty dollars with a cabin ten by twelve feet square. The roof was brush and sod. Joel Britts father had come to Primrose on May 22, 1847 and bought two hundred acres of land which included the present site of Mt. Vernon. Mr. Britts says that on November 1, 1848 that ten inches of snow fell in one night and that it snowed every other day for thirty days. He said deer and wolves were plentiful that winter but when spring came the wolves had eaten the deer and there were none left.



Street Scenes of Earlier Times



## **BLACK DIPHTHERIA**

A man named Hobbinger who lived across the river by the old Allen's hotel owned a carpenter shop. He made caskets. During the Black Diphtheria epidemic the demand was so great that he could not make them fast enough and many of the bodies were in very bad condition before they could be hurried. It is thought that Mr. Hobbinger made Ida Van Norman's casket, he also made Grandma Spears casket. It was made of black walnut. Her body was dug up in 1866 for the purpose of transferring it to the Mosco cemetery. It was very astonishing to find that her body had petrified and in the removal the head had broken off. Another story is told about Mr. Hobbinger. It says one night after over indulging the boys carried him home and put him in one of his own caskets. Mr. John Harker told me the story about the Roger Shephard family. He said that during the epidemic his mother took care of the whole family. Dr. Kelly was the attending physician at that time. The whole Shephard family with the exception of a son named Robert died and was hurried on what is now known as the Ray Bakkin farm. Mr. Harker said none of their family got the disease. Mr. Harker's father and the other neighbors hurried the bodies on the farm. Twenty years later they were removed to the Belleville cemetery.

## **A HUMOROUS TRAGEDY**

Mr. and Mrs. Clark Lewis had a prize dairy cow. This cow had given birth to a fine calf which they decided to raise to take the place of the mother for which they had been offered a handsome price. When the calf had reached the age so it could eat grass, they sold the mother cow for forty dollars. Mrs. Lewis had the forty dollars tied up in a handkerchief in her apron pocket. She had pulled some grass for the calf to eat and while the calf was eating the grass out of her apron it swallowed the handkerchief, money and all. This was indeed a tragedy as Mr. Allen the butcher had to be called to kill the calf. This he did and he really recovered the hankie with the forty dollars in it but poor Mr. and Mrs. Lewis had neither cow nor calf.

## **OLD LAND MARKS**

There is a huge round stone still in its place where Andrew and Pete Peterson's old blacksmith shop used to stand. This stone was used in the making of wagon wheels. The old pine tree on the corner where Kolletts garage is, is the only remaining one of several that sheltered the Andrew Peterson home. There are a few of the pines left that shaded the yard of the old Knudtson home. A clump of tiger-lillies still grow in the garden at the home of Mrs. Dell Erfurth, these lillies grew at the garden gate of the old Billings Lewis home. The house stood just north of the one now occupied by Mrs. Erfurth and her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Davis.

A spring on the Goggins Hill which supplied the water for the Pat Goggins Family is another old landmark. The big spring near

the rock where George Patchin built his first cabin. The lilac bush that grew beside the Van Norman home in Primrose. The spring near the McCord rock beside which my mother sat as she made her wedding dress. (The large willow tree that she sat beneath has long since died.) The old hall which was once the creamery. The mill. The charming little house on the corner now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Erfurth has sheltered every enterprise Mt. Vernon ever boasted. The old house now occupied by Eli Kobbervick (the tavern) at one time was a factory that manufactured cheese. Harry Watt was the cheesemaker. The old Minor house, a picturesque old house built by the side of the road, by Mr. Minor a veteran of the Civil War. The little stream beside the road babbles merrily on but does not tell of the interesting court trial held in Mt. Vernon and presided over by Judge Alva Stewart. The story of this trial will be found between the covers of this book. The Baptist church now almost deserted except for the funerals of the one time members of the old church. The house once the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clark Lewis which stands at the end of the lane occupied by the Way family. And near this house stands the huge maple tree that each autumn becomes a beautiful sight. Part of the basement, all that remains of the once famous Allen Hotel. The village common where once grazed the village cows and sheep, now the famous Forest of Fame Park.

A large stone that was set years ago by Carl Erfurth below the McCord rocks. Mr. Brader asked my father years ago what could be done on that corner as the teamsters used to turn the corner too short. So my father loaded this huge stone on his wagon and took it to this corner and set it there as it stands to this day.

A more recent structure, but never the less interesting is that of an open well with the old oaken bucket. This was built by Carl Erfurth when he was passed eighty years old. It can be seen near the road on the Herman Erfurth farm and will always stand in memory of the mason work my father did.

An ancient land mark is the Mt. Vernon rocks. They have always added distinction to the village. When the first settlers came to the village there was a beautiful pine tree growing on top of one of the rocks. It was a noted object of interest to the visitors because of its marked distinction from all of its surroundings. It was blown down by a wind storm on New Years Night 1876.

#### **BUSINESS MEN OF MT. VERNON IN 1946**

Store Keeper—Andrew Nelson.

Mill Operator—Herbert Hankel.

Village Blacksmith—Minor Marty.

Garage Owners—Alfred Eggiman and Rodney Kolleth.

Auctioneer—H. C. Erfurth.

Tavern Operators—Eli Kobbervig and Mrs. Eggiman.



## The Public Square

THE BRITTS DONATED the plot of land first known as Britts Park to Mt. Vernon to be used as a play ground and recreation park. But for many years sheep and cattle grazed upon it.

It was on April 5, 1920 that a group of Mt. Vernon citizens got together and pledged themselves to organize a Park Board and incorporate in order to insure better control and care. This group consisted of Ferdinand Koch, John Shettler Jr., H. B. Mitchell, Wm. Johnson, August C. Koch, Arthur Moore, J. K. Kittleson, Fred L. Koch, Wm. Rea, Sam Piper, Roy Hale, Raymond Beard, Wm. Arnold, John Beard, Laverne I. Johnson, Herbert Koch, Sever Sponem, Albert Lee, Martin Olson, Selmer Ferdinand Koch, and William Johnson.

The Mt. Vernon association changed the name of the Park from "Britt's Park" to "Mt. Vernon Park."

Frank Moore and Fred Koch served devoutly as President and Secretary of the Park board until Mr. Moore retired from the board in 1946.

The members now serving are: Ralph Davis, President, Fred Koch, Secretary, Gerald Erfurth, Treasure, Arthur Moore, Minor Marty, Rodney Kollath, Trustees.



## FOREST OF FAME

The story of the Forest of Fame began when Hon. John S. Donald was visiting in Washington and was walking through the ground of George Washington's birth place at Mt. Vernon, Virginia on the banks of the Potomac River. He picked up two walnuts and put them in his pocket and a guard approached him and told him he was not allowed to take these nuts. So he explained to the guard that he wanted to bring the nuts here to Mt. Vernon and plant them because Mt. Vernon, Wisconsin is situated on a branch of the Sugar River the same direction and distance from the Capitol of the state as is Mt. Vernon, Virginia, from the National Capitol. After this explanation the guard took him to the caretaker and introduced Mr. Donald to him then the caretaker gave him several walnuts and Mr. Donald planted them but none of them grew. Finally a half dozen small elms were secured and set out.

1. The George Washington trees were secured and set out on the "Public Square" at Mt. Vernon, Wisconsin, Arbor Day 1916.

2. One year later elms from the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln, Hodginsville, Kentucky were planted.

3. In 1919 one of the five spruce trees, which had been taken from Gen. Pershing's A. E. F. Headquarters, Chaumont, France, was placed here and the idea of the Forest of Fame took root.

Trees from the birthplaces or homes of the following illustrious persons have since been planted:

4. U. S. Grant, Galena, Illinois—1926.
5. Rutherford B. Hayes, Freemont, Ohio—1924.
6. Wm. McKinley, Canton, Ohio—1926.
7. Gov. Lucius Fairchild, Madison, Wisconsin—1926.
8. Gov. Jeremiah M. Rusk, Viroqua, Wisconsin—1926.
9. William D. Hoard, Ft. Atkinson, Wis.—1926.
10. Joan of Arc, Domrey, France—1919.
11. Gov. Farwell, Madison, Wisconsin—1927.
12. Gov. Washburn, Madison, Wisconsin—1927.
13. Gov. Taylor, Cottage Grove, Wis.—1927.
14. Theo. Roosevelt, Long Island, N. Y.—1927.
15. Rob't M. LaFollette, Mt. Vernon, Wis.—1927.
16. Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, Va.—1927.
17. Daniel Webster, Salisbury, New Hampshire—1927.
18. Also Robin Hood Oaks, Sherwood Forest, England; Napoleon, Willow, France; Babylonian and Welch Willows.
19. Henry Clay (Ash), from Lexington, Kentucky—1928.
20. Robert E. Lee (Ash), from Lexington, Virginia—1928.
21. Woodrow Wilson (Spruce), from Washington, D. C.—1928.
22. Luther Burbank (Mountain Ash), from Experimental Farms, California—1928.



23. J. Sterling Morton (Elm) from Nebraska City, Nebraska—1928.
24. Frances Willard (Elm), from Janesville, Wisconsin—1928.
25. Ethan Allen—1931.
26. Eben Rexford, Shiocton—1931.
27. Stephen M. Babcock—1932.
28. Buffalo Bill, Cody, Wyo.—1933.
29. Paul Harris, Rotary International—1933.
30. Charles A. Lindbergh, Little Falls, Minn.—1933.
31. John S. Donald, Oak. Planted by the friends and neighbors, the Rotary Club of Madison and the Friends of Our Native Landscape—1937.
32. "Liberty Tree." Planted by the Swiss Cheesemakers Assn.—1940. The Only tree not transplanted from the native locality of the person honored. Perhaps someday this can be replaced by a tree from Switzerland.

Each tree is charted and marked. In 1927 Governor Zimmerman and Lieut. Governor H. A. Huber took part in planting. Many members of the Legislature were present. The speeches were printed in the Journals of the Senate and Assembly, thus giving the project state wide and even national recognition because it is the first memorial planting in which all of the trees are transplanted from the actual spots where these people lived. They have all been given by the family, their estates or by patriotic societies.

The east side of the Square is the Governor's row. The north side is the President's row.

### **FOUNDER OF THE FOREST OF FAME**

Honorable John S. Donald was born in a log cabin on the bank of the stream running through the old Sweet farm on Jan. 12, 1869. Mother, Ellen Sweet Donald, Father, John Strong Donald. His Grandparents were, James Donald and Margaret Strong Donald. William Sweet and Sarah Clark Sweet. These grandparents settled on adjoining farms in the year 1855. Honorable John S. Donald passed on, Jan. 10, 1934.

(The following, an exact duplication of an article, including pictures and captions, appearing in Vol. XVII, No. 11 of the "Wisconsin Horticulture", dated July, 1927, is reprinted thru the courtesy of the Wisconsin State Horticultural Society.)

## Forest of Fame

During the past decade there has been developing within three quarters of an hour's ride from Madison a unique park planting which will beyond doubt become one of our most interesting spots to lovers of nature in this section of the country. From the desire of a man to bring back to his native Mount Vernon, Wisconsin, some of the beauty of Mount Vernon on the Potomac, grew this unusual park plan. With this as a beginning the originator, John S. Donald, is adding to it as rapidly as possible with the hope of developing eventually a forest of historic interest.

The Forest of Fame at Mount Vernon, Wisconsin, is situated on a branch of Sugar River, the same direction and distance from the capitol of this state as is Mount Vernon, Virginia, from the National Capitol at Washington. It is in a beautiful, picturesque valley flanked with hills and rocks.

Ten years ago, after two attempts to grow here black walnuts, brought from the home of George Washington on the Potomac, had been made and had failed, a half dozen small elms and maples were secured from this historic place and were set out on the public square of Mount Vernon, Wisconsin. The schools of the township and a number of people from surrounding towns and Madison took part in the ceremony of the planting. These trees thrived and this was the beginning of the movement to obtain other trees from the homes of great men.

Since then trees have been obtained, set out and are growing in this park from the homes or birthplaces of Presidents Lincoln, Grant, Hayes and McKinley, also from the homes of Governors Rusk, Fairchild and Hoard. On May 14, 1927 an elm tree from the home of Governor Farwell, a maple from the home of Governor Taylor at Cottage Grove, Wisconsin, and an elm from Governor Washburn's home at Madison, were planted. At this time also was set out a memorial elm from the LaFollette farm, and dogwoods from the Roosevelt estate at Sagamore Hill, Long Island, New York.

In addition to these trees from the homes of famous Americans there is a spruce tree from the American Expeditionary Force Headquarters of General Pershing at Chaumont, France, and a laurel willow from the birthplace of Joan of Arc, Domremy, France. Two Robinhood oaks from Sherwood Forest, England, have been grown from acorns secured from those historic trees. There are also the Babylonian, Norway, and Welch willows growing in the park.

Trees from the homes of a number of presidents, governors and other distinguished persons have been promised for planting



in the near future. The "Public Square" has now been converted into a public park and incorporated, in order that the trees may have proper control and care. Each tree will be charted and permanently marked, and with other interesting additions from time to time, this park should ere long become a real "Forest of Fame."



The picturesque valley at Mount Vernon, Wisconsin, where the "Forest of Fame" is located. (Photographed many years ago—ed.)



Spruce from A.E.F. Headquarters, Cheumont, France.



John S. Donald, president of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Friends of Our Native Landscape, and originator of the "Forest of Fame" project.



# Mt. Vernon Yesterdays

By Albert O. Barton

**L**IKE A PRINT in some old picture book, the little village of Mt. Vernon lies dozing in the summer sunshine. As one walks down its one still and lifeless street at noonday—particularly if he be a returned old-timer who remembers its more teeming days—it seems as had its little populace all departed on some holiday, such is his sense of loneliness.

Yet, however long he may have been absent, the returned pilgrim will feel all the intervening years drop from him, for the one great fact that dominated the place of yore remains changeless and unchangeable, and he seems to stand as he last stood there himself. This fact is the great Mt. Vernon hill. This massive limestone rampart, which overlooks the tiny village and river, sits in its native solidity, sphinx-like and unrelenting as ever.

It is from the top of this hill that one gets his best view of Mt. Vernon, with its sole two streets meeting at right angles, and with the millpond and the laggard little stream meandering reluctantly down the valley. Conspicuous in the scene is the "little white church in the vale," so-called, with its modest cupola, and near it the Mt. Vernon school, its once solid masonry now succeeded by a white frame structure. Viewed from this height of a summer's day, it is a lovely and peaceful scene, with a wide carpet of green stretching down the valley and the low wooded hills set with pretty farms to the eastward. No belching columns of smoke stain or pollute its tremulant atmosphere, for neither factory nor iron horse ever invaded the scene to break its rural enchantment.

The founders of Mt. Vernon, being of southern origin, and having some vision, did the very praiseworthy thing of laying out a village square or common. Both church and school face this square where for generations in the past the village cows and horses were wont to graze and where Sunday baseball games were held to the distress of the pious Baptists worshipping in the church at hand.

Lying on the boundary line between the townships of Springdale and Primrose, Mt. Vernon history may be said to include much of that of the surrounding area of southwestern Dane county.

An early day plat of the village reveals the interesting fact that it once boasted of thirty and more squares, on paper, and streets bearing the names of such colonial and Revolutionary worthies as Penn, Franklin, Washington, Greene and Jackson. The main road running north and south through town (now Highway 92) was appropriately named Washington street by its Virginia founder, while the chief business street running east and west was known as Main street. The Baptist church faces theoretically on

a street before it running to the river and known as Jackson street. In fact, the public square is bounded by Washington, Jackson, Penn and Greene streets.

Furthermore, the town was to have had two public squares, according to this plat, the present one, known as the "Public Square," and another at the intersection with the Madison road to be known as the "Town Square." Of such were the dreams of the town's founders, dreams that the adventitious circumstance of the coming of a railroad might have realized.

On the west side of the river, and separated from Mt. Vernon hill by a concave-like ravine, are the Mt. Vernon rocks, which really give to the place its distinctive and picturesque beauty. Looming higher than even the Mt. Vernon hill, these gray-walled memorials of pre-glacial times, in their setting of native trees, and capped by a gigantic cube, or "sugar loaf," give to Mt. Vernon a claim to beauty and distinction not enjoyed by many hamlets. Originally there was a twin "sugar loaf," much like the present remaining one, and sitting also on the top of a rocky wall, left there as had they been the forgotten playthings of some titan of past ages. But alas! Years ago a group of boys, lacking appreciation of the majestic and unique charm it gave the scene, could not forbear toppling it over the edge of the precipice, whence it went crashing with resounding violence through the underbrush and plunged with frightful splash deep into the mucky bottom of the pond below. Doubtless through long past ages the dusky children of the forest had communed about these stony altars of the skies in the setting sun, or in the glow of their own campfires, yet had respected the memorials which a later vandal race was to partially destroy.

Originally too, a lone pine—the last gnarled remnant of its verdant line—lifted its top above the rocky walls and was a commanding feature to the eye. Set in a perilous cleft in the cliff, whence it drew its seemingly impossible life, it had escaped or resisted the destructive forces which had wiped out its fellows. There it remained, a dash of green cheer and hope in winter, a bit of garniture amid the shifting hues of its more common neighbors in summer and autumn. But the debt of nature had to be met, even in this rocky security, and on New Year's day, 1876, it fell before the wintry blast and a thing of beauty was no more.

The Mt. Vernon rocks are not alone of their kind in this valley. A half mile to the northward are the so-called McCord rocks, a castellated group of impressive beauty, while a mile or more to the southward uprears the more striking "Devil's Chimney," a chimney-shaped sandstone pillar which rises in solitary majesty out of the sandy bed of the valley to a height of 70 feet. Extending outward from near its base is a small "natural bridge," a counterpart of others in the world better known. Because of its bulging top, the chimney has been a temptation to many genera-



tions of adventurous climbers, but few indeed are those who have been able to scale it "bare-handed."

Because also of its solitary situation, this geologic monolith, which has survived through eons of erosion, has a particularly fascinating appeal. Monument of an era in whose mists even the imagination becomes lost, the pyramids are to it as but of yesterday. Earthquake, tempest and the all-devouring teeth of water and frost have assailed it since mortal time began, yet unshaken it stands, as unshakingly it met the great tornado of 1878 and divided its puny current of destruction.

Dividing distinction with the rocks and the great hill rising above it is the Mt. Vernon mill-pond, now sadly shrunk from its old-time importance. To the children at least, it was a generation ago, a mimic lake, charming, mysterious, fascinating.

A half century and more ago a thrill of horror ran through the countryside at the news of a sad double drowning in this beautiful sheet of water. A youth and maiden, both in their early teens and at school there, had loosened the one rowboat the place then boasted, a wide flat-bottomed dory, and with three companions set out upon its inviting surface at the noon hour. There seemed scarcely any possibility of danger. Whatever the cause of the accident, the boat was upset and two of its occupants drowned in comparatively shallow water and near shore. A sad tragedy this, in that day of fewer violent accidents than the present. Ida Van Norman, a lovely and popular girl, the light and hope of a happy farm home, and William Alec Osburn, likewise a loved and promising youth, were thus suddenly cut off in their very bloom. The blow shook particularly Ida's stalwart soldier father—more perhaps than had the shocks of battle—and while it could not be said in after years that "he never smiled again," he never felt again the zest and hope of life that he had before the tragedy. This nine-day horror was long the theme of rustic conversation and gave its darkest legend to the Mt. Vernon mill-pond.

That this lovely region and site in which Mt. Vernon nestles had appealed to an earlier race, and had, in fact, long been the center of a peaceful communal life is abundantly proven in the quantity of relics that have been found in a cultivated field near the foot of the rocks. (A collection of such relics by one of the pioneers of the village, Clarke J. Lewis, was much admired in his day). Here on a level area near one of the big springs the plowman's share has for years turned up hundreds of arrow and spear heads, stone axes, celts, fireplace stones and broken pottery, all mute evidence to the imaginative eye of a village habitation through a long course of years. Here the aboriginal craftsman had practiced his art of arrow-making and doubtless other forms of industry were followed, the evidence of which have perished. The cultivated field now embracing this site doubtless was tilled in cruder fashion long before by a race which may here have found

the dreams, the security and peace, associated with home. As the site of an earlier communal life, it may therefore be regarded as holy ground.

Not far away is a weed-grown excavation of a vanished cabin, said to have been that of George Patchin and built five years before George Britts began his Mt. Vernon sawmill in 1852 and Hall Clark Chandler, leader of the Chandler group and later extensive land owner, opened the first store near to this mill.

In a sense, the name "Mt. Vernon," like that of the Virginia shrine, is a misnomer; neither has any distinctive "mount" near it. The Wisconsin beauty spot was, however, named by a loyal Virginian, George Britts, in honor of Washington's old home, probably because of some fancied resemblance that occurred to him. And well it was that this historic name was not inappropriately bestowed upon some undistinctive or ugly place elsewhere in the state. Britts, as was the custom then, sought to found a town by the building of a mill. This was in 1852. Some years previous to this George Patchin had built a cabin near the big spring north of the rocks, near the site of the earlier Indian village. The early trail which led southwest to the lead mines crossed the stream at the edge of the spring and traces of this road still remain. This route afforded an easier passage over the Mt. Vernon hill than did the later roads laid out.

Mt. Vernon too had its boom period. It is said that in the cities of the east lithographs were displayed showing steamboats tied up at piers in the millpond, and investors were urged to buy lots quickly in this coming western "city." Legend has it that the olympian Daniel Webster, who had various investments in Dane county, was pointed by the promoters as one already shrewd enough to come in "on the ground floor," but as he died in 1852 this hardly seems probable.

No real boom came to Mt. Vernon, however, yet through quite a period of years following the civil war it was a place of considerable business, with clanging blacksmith shops, hotels, saloons and crowded stores; with its own shoemaker, carriage maker and harness shop, etc. It also had its postoffice, supplied by a weekly stage line to and from Madison, later semi or tri-weekly as the railroad came nearer. All this was before rural delivery, prohibition, the automobile and good roads were to deprive it of its post-office, its hotels and saloons, and so much of its trade that save for its school and its grist mill its active life was about over.

The heyday of Mt. Vernon was in the later '70s and early '80s, when it enjoyed a big country trade, in spite of the bad roads of spring and fall in that period of unimproved highways. Long rows of farmers' teams were tied along the streets, and poultry, eggs and butter were brought in by the farmers to be exchanged for clothing, molasses, barrels of salt, farm tools, overalls, boots and shoes, plug tobacco, calico, brown sugar, rock candy, gum,



and the thousand and one other commodities of which the ambitious country store then boasted. Even gunpowder was sold by the light of burning kerosene lamps near at hand—for small game was plentiful—yet it is not of record that any explosion ever occurred to play havoc with the rural statesmen or town “smart alecks” gathered nightly around the long stove at the front. Here Herman B. Dahle, later congressman, came with his bride in 1877 and with fair dealing and charming manner built up a wonderful trade and won the unshakeable confidence of the community. The chief store of the place, known successively as the Carleton, Brader, Dahle and Weltzin store, was a sort of capitol of the place, for here the postoffice was for years maintained.

To this postoffice a dreamy, sometimes melancholy, country boy would come of summer evenings—at times on horseback, at times on bruised bare feet—for the weekly or semi-weekly mail, with its mysterious possibilities; its treasured rural weeklies, with their young people’s columns, the National Tribune, replete with Civil war tales and crude cuts and the weekly Inter Ocean with continued stories, political polemics and historical articles. Occasionally the trip would be made at burning noonday bearing some broken mower sickle to be repaired. In those days the ring of the blacksmith’s anvil could be heard all day and the ingenuity of one of the grimy vulcans (Sever Belgum) in fashioning strange devices and repairing impossible breaks in machinery was heralded far and wide.

The Brader store had followed one which had been destroyed by fire. W. A. Housel of Spokane, Wash., says that when the Good Templar movement was at its height (probably about 1872) the young Templars of the region held their meetings above this store. “At these meetings,” he says, “we initiated new members, went over the forms and ceremonies of the order, and some of the members, Bob and Josie LaFollette, Laurence Ketchum, Sammy Miles and others contributed articles which the recording secretary was called upon to read, and, as I remember, they waxed quite sarcastic and personal occasionally, which caused much merriment among the listeners.”

Unfortunately this large, well-built landmark, dear to the memory of every old-timer, had to fall a victim to modern carelessness. In the summer of 1925 a gasoline fire in a garage next door quickly jumped to the old store and after an hour or two only a smoking cellar, blackened walls and twisted iron remained of this once familiar landmark.

Amid the unglaciated hills of Primrose and Springdale many pioneer practices long survived and oxen trudged the streets of Mt. Vernon even within the writer’s memory. One wide-bowed yoke from the town of Perry is particularly recalled. This pair of oxen did not reflect the wisdom of Egypt in their large bland eyes, as poets are wont to imagine they do, but held up their heads

and went jauntily along over the roads with their burdens and at a rate of speed not greatly exceeded by horse teams at the time.

The oxen and pioneer days of Mt. Vernon are now lost in the mists of antiquity, but out of these mists emerges one character whose name survives because given to a hill, and the hills of Mt. Vernon antedate the glacial epochs of the past.

In "Kelly Hill," a sandstone hump scarcely worthy the name hill, is preserved the memory of "Doc." Kelly (James M. Keilly), a saddlebags physician of the time, who lived "out of town," near where stands now the Kelly Hill cheese factory on the Verona road. Here also lived his brother, "Col.," Ebenezer Keilly, a sort of early day lawyer and teacher, later prominent in Crawford county politics. Mr. Housel says the colonel had 40 acres of sandy land and that the doctor lived on this land, their homes being near together. After Dr. Keilly's wife died he moved to Mt. Vernon and had an office across the road from the mill.

As throwing light on an early day school, an extract from Mr. Housel's letter may be permitted:

"... The colonel taught school during the winter season; in fact, he was my first teacher, and taught in the small log schoolhouse located about one mile east of his home place, and as he lived in the same district his children attended the same school. I can remember only four of them, Samuel, Thomas, Abrey and Leticia (Letitia), whom we called 'Tish', for short. The colonel was regarded by the people of that countryside as a very able teacher. He laid down some very strict rules and regulations, and any infraction of these meant corporal punishment for the offender, his own children coming in for their share. As he was a tall, bony, athletic sort of man, he did not hesitate to tackle the biggest ones in the bunch and it seemed to me the larger the culprit the harder he laid on the willow sprout. I remember he used to dispatch a young German, Carl Morig, by name, to procure the instruments of torture. He seemed to be afraid of the colonel and I thought he cut the willow sprouts rather large and rather enjoyed seeing the other fellow get his. As all the parents of the district were back of the colonel 100 percent, he did not spare the rod. I always considered him a good teacher.

"He also used to make campaign speeches with great vigor and enthusiasm, and I remember that he could not get very far along with his address before the perspiration would be running off his rather large nose and chin whiskers. He also delivered fourth of July orations in the early days and was considered a very good auctioneer in his day. The family grew up there and drifted away; his wife died and was buried on the little farm. On my last



visit back in Wisconsin the neighbors told me that two of his sons, Thomas and Samuel, had been back and were quite well dressed men. They had bought a tract of land on the site of the old farm, and fenced it and had erected a small monument to the memory of their mother. They had been away so long that they could not remember the exact spot where she was buried . . . ”

It was at the Mt. Vernon mill, by the way, that on Oct. 24, 1859, Col. Kelly presided in what was perhaps the most exciting episode in Mt. Vernon history, the driving out of the Byams; when the embattled farmers of Primrose, for the second time in their history, took the law into their own hands to deal with law violators. Echoes of the Byam episode, by the way, were to be heard for many a year, and its story was related by the writer at the Mt. Vernon homecoming on its sixtieth anniversary, Oct. 24, 1919. Its fuller story is found in the account written by Mrs. Robert Pope.

A daughter of Col. Keilly (Mrs. Celia Chamberlain), recently living, has given the writer some interesting recollections of the Mt. Vernon of her childhood. The Keillys (Kellys) were evidently regarded as influential citizens of the neighborhood, as their country home was often the rendezvous of Madison politicians in their quest for votes. Here came such men as General Lucius Fairchild, Willett Main, George B. Smith, Dr. J. B. Bowen and others. One amusing incident stands out in her memory. On one of his horseback campaign tours Governor Fairchild came there and rapped on the farmhouse door. Mrs. Keilly had often been deceived by the children knocking on the door and thinking they were again at their tricks she called out: “Come in, if your nose is clean.” Interesting too is her recollection of a visit to their home by Mrs. Mary LaFollette with her infant son Robert and when she (Celia) as a mature miss of 4 or 5 had the responsibility of holding the squirming future statesman on her lap on the floor.

Across the road from the later Hankel home and nearer Mt. Vernon stood the Luther D. Robbins home, the site now marked by a clump of bushes and trees. Mr. Robbins was a horseman, cabinet and coffin maker and was envied for his tasseled carriage and fine horses. In the '60s he was clerk of the Mt. Vernon school-board. Mrs. Robbins was said to have been of Byam stock and to have been related to the Wheeler family of Westport. The late Mrs. E. Donald Jones said Ella Wheeler, Wisconsin's famous poetess, visited the Robbinses as a child at times.

Among the other interesting characters that lived in Mt. Vernon a generation ago was Charles J. Agrelius, a celebrated horse thief. He was of Swedish birth, a son of one of the pioneer ministers of Wisconsin and himself a civil war veteran. His reputed exploits as a modern Dick Turpin savor of highly colored romance, yet may be less than the truth. For years before and

after leaving Mt. Vernon he plied his trade of horse-stealing and was frequently in the toils of the law. At Mt. Vernon he had married a Miss Hebbe and was in the harness-making business with her brothers there and carrying on horse-stealing at the same time under the guise of selling nursery stock.

He was skilled in the art of making over horses so that they would not be recognized readily after being stolen. For instance, Ike Brader had a fine span of young bays. One of them had a star in his forehead, while the other had none. One day Agrelius asked Brader if he would not like to have a star put in the forehead of the plain one so that the two would be matched. To this Brader assented whereupon Agrelius took a raw potato and cut a slice from it. This he placed on the forehead of the horse with the star and trimmed it to fit the star. Then he tied the head of the plain horse up high and firmly and heating the potato slice he applied it to the horse's forehead, branding it. When the hair grew out again, as the story goes, a white star appeared, practically a counterpart of the other horse's.

After an absence of several years Agrelius again came to Mt. Vernon and was in the harness-making business with Bert Webber.

Agrelius served several terms in the state prison at Waupun and records show that he was discharged there after serving various terms in 1877, 1883, 1892 and 1903. In 1904, when 84 years old, he was again arrested in northern Illinois for horse-stealing in southern Wisconsin. While in prison he was visited by his old neighbor, Mr. Brader, and told the latter of some of his exploits. One of these was the stealing of a fine team of blacks from Pat Bannon of Springdale. These he concealed in a cave in the basement of the McCord farm near Mt. Vernon and whitened their hind legs and otherwise changed their appearance. Then he took them to Madison and sold them. Mr. Bannon, he said, was in Madison the very day they were sold and saw them, declaring that if it had not been for their white feet he would have sworn they were his own horses. About this time he said he also stole a horse from Mrs. Saxton, R. M. LaFollette's mother, the future governor being then at home as a boy conducting the farm.

Agrelius had a very plausible and pleasing manner. He had a remarkable talent for story-telling and would often regale his hearers with tales of most incredible and stirring nature in many of which he figured as the hero. He was also an accomplished ventriloquist and imitator of musical instruments and as he drove along the roads he delighted in startling or entertaining children and others along the way with his strange calls, songs and whistlings. He was finally paroled from Waupun and transferred to a soldiers' home in Kansas, in which state one of his sons has since won high distinction as a scientist on a university staff.

While a small place, Mt. Vernon was a town of marked individuality and strong men in the days of the Bradens, the Joneses,



the Chandlers and the Lewises, with such nearby families as the Hales, Foyes, Pierces, Harkers and others. In this group were men of much intelligence, of strong convictions and with a flair for disputation. Their race has long since vanished.

It was also noted for the fistie prowess of its "gang." In fact, Mt. Vernon was known as a famous fighting town. Its champions were known far and wide as hard hitters and were correspondingly feared and respected. Boxing was then a diversion among the young bloods of the neighborhood to relieve the monotony of farm work or quiet village life. Like the James gang of the time, the Mt. Vernon bloods would suddenly put in an appearance at some Swiss dance in New Glarus, some German picnic in the town of Perry or some Norwegian barn dance in Springdale, and as a rule a battle followed. The practice in beginning hostilities was to wait until some overheated dancer would shed his coat to cool off. He would then be asked if he stripped for the purpose of fighting and the battle was soon on. It is related that Mt. Vernon's chief hitter (for years afterwards a respected Madison citizen), while working as a farm hand in Springdale, once took on a whole "barnful" of antagonists at once. Standing in a corner he knocked out one comer after another and jauntily called out: "Drag 'im out and bring on the next." Not always did they fare so well however. One Norwegian champion known as "Big Halvor," who had not been taught to fear them, encountered the gang at a dance at the Britts mill in Primrose and threw several of them into the mill race in the course of the melee, which added to his own prestige thereafter.

Of an even more sordid nature would be the story of Mt. Vernon's saloon period. It would be the old familiar story, however. In its palmy days the town had two saloons. These finally had their day and were long before the national prohibition came along. A fine home now marks the corner where stood one of them, while the other only crumbling, vine-grown cellar walls that recall rather the once well-known Allen hotel, where travelers were accomodated and many a famous dance was held in its day.

Of the Mt. Vernon school some pupil, past or present, should write the story, recalling its red-letter days, its notable teachers and other things of interest. A like service should be done for the old church. While this church is nominally Baptist, it has been largely a people's church. However, it never had the support to make it the center of social activity that village churches often are. For one thing, the men of the town were never gay at anything like a united backing, since they were themselves drawn from many elements and sections and therefore had little in common in religious matters. A valiant Baptist group, however, aided by saddle-bag pastors from Madison and elsewhere sustained its feeble life through the slow years of the time. Baptism by immersion in the river below the church was an occasional and gay ceremony.

In the early years of the civil war it is said the elder sister of the later Senator Robert M. LaFollette and others of the Eastman family were among those so immersed and thus became members of the church. It was about this time that Mrs. LaFollette married her third husband, John Z. Saxton, an elderly and pious Baptist, and with her children moved with him to Argyle for some years. Rev. George S. Martin, a civil war veteran, and his son of the same name were among the pastors whose names are prominent in its annals.

For years this old house of worship suffered neglect and seemed doomed to fall to ruin. Through a peculiar circumstance, suggestive of old-time miracles, it was saved. While a funeral was being held there one hot summer day, an attempt was made to open one of the windows. This disturbed a nest of wasps which had taken possession of one of the window frames and sealed it up. These original papermakers had doubtless concluded that the structure had been abandoned and so disliked being disturbed that they nearly broke up the funeral. This suggested a bright thought to a lady present, and after much tramping and a variety of Cranford visits among the village housewives, she formed a ladies aid to save and restore the church. One by one the needed things were done. A new roof, chimney, shades, etc., were provided. In fact, the little band succeeded in raising \$700 in five years.

The division finally came on the question of a new pulpit and chairs. Here the old and the new orders met. One group believed the old pulpit should be retained because of its associations and for sentimental reasons. It would be a potent rallying symbol, like the bones of Joseph that the Israelites carried with them.

And, as might be expected—though hardly in Mt. Vernon—the new triumphed and a modern pulpit took the place of the old, while the old chairs are now treasured in private homes.

The most marked manifestation of public interest in the village in recent years has been in connection with tree-plantings on the public square and for which the church has been utilized at times for the exercises.

Latterly this square has taken on a new character which eventually may give the village its chief distinction, for here is to be a future "forest of fame," which will no doubt draw its curious, if not reverent, thousands in years to come. This is the outgrowth of a happy idea. As part of John S. Donald, a native and honored son of the region, and as a memorial to him as well. Beginning with a memorial tree from Washington's old home at Mount Vernon, Virginia, in 1916, he gradually added others from the homes of other great Americans, such as Lincoln, Jefferson, Grant, Roosevelt and Wilson, besides memorials from the war fields of France, from Sherwood Forest and from Joan of Arc's native country. Governors of Wisconsin stand, as it were, with presidents and generals, among them, of course, the



illustrious Robert Marion LaFollette, likewise a native son of the region, whose tree was dedicated in 1927, with the then governor of the state present and participating in the exercises. Even the spirit of the great Napoleon seems to brood there in the willow offshoots from his first grave on rocky St. Helena. Interesting exercises have marked some of the plantings under Mr. Donald's direction, as, for instance, on the occasion soon after the world war when a group of girls from France, in native costume, assisted in the ceremonies.

The several LaFollette families of pioneer Primrose became early associated with Mt. Vernon, as did their neighbors, the Ketchums, the Dixons, the Ashes and others. The Britts and LaFollette families were near friends and neighbors in Indiana and when Joel Britts came to the site of Mt. Vernon in the spring of 1848 Josiah LaFollette was led to follow him the next year. When Josiah LaFollette died in February, 1856, Hall C. Chandler of Mt. Vernon was appointed guardian of the estate. Hall Chandler's wife was a foster daughter of John G. Saxton, aged storekeeper of Argyle, Lafayette county, and when Saxton came to visit the Chandlers he met Mrs. LaFollette, whom he married in 1862, the Chandlers in the meantime promoting the match. Further, when Clara Chandler, daughter of Hall Chandler, was married in 1866 to Sam H. Britts, son of Joel Britts, the Chandler, Britts and LaFollette families became inter-related.

In the course of his long political career Bob LaFollette made many speeches in Mt. Vernon, in the schoolhouse, the church or Allen's hall. In dramatic interest, however, no later appearance approached the triumph of his first one given before his own people the 5th of July, 1880. It became a temporary legend and reverberations of it were heard for years afterwards. It was the first independence day celebration Mt. Vernon had staged for ten years and much was made of Bob LaFollette's promise to be the orator of the occasion. He was already famous as the winner of the interstate oratorical contest in the university the year before. He had several invitations to speak and accepted three of them over the three-day celebration period of Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The Mt. Vernon celebration was held in a grove on top of the Mt. Vernon hill on the road dividing the townships of Springdale and Primrose. The speaker's platform had been built wholly within the township of Springdale.

When Bob LaFollette saw this he objected at once and refused to speak unless the platform were extended across the road so that he could speak from his native soil of Primrose. This sudden flare-up of local patriotism doubtless appealed to his friends for they promptly extended the platform across the road. Here then was a state highway illegally set aside to gratify a young man's whim. But it was a patriotic impulse and the young orator spoke with greater fire and ardor, drawing, like the Greek wrestler of old, renewed power from his native soil. No Mt. Vernon band had yet appeared on the scene, but musical resources were not wanting for

Sam Rea with his Scotch bagpipe woke the ancient airs of highland patriotism and B. F. Rogers, song leader, had a trained choir on hand and his ever-present Kimball organ.

For a generation the Brader name was synonymous with that of Mt. Vernon. Isaac G. Brader, early storekeeper, was postmaster from 1856 to 1877. For years he was also deacon of the Baptist church. Brader was English-born, as were some of his children, most prominent of whom was Isaac G., Jr., familiarly known as "Ike," who following a long career as merchant became a member of the legislature and died in Storm Lake, Iowa, Jan. 4, 1939, at the high age of 93. His son James C., as a youth, was the fashion plate of the village and envied because of his smattering of higher education. Alfred C. Brader served a brief enlistment in the Union army during the civil war.

John Jones, son of the pioneer of the same name, was in his day Mt. Vernon's representative citizen. As farmer, stockbuyer and miller, he was to become widely known as the gentleman of the village. A handsome man, gentle and refined, of erect and dignified bearing, and with a down-hanging white beard, he might, outwardly at least, have fitted into a British cabinet. He was a native of Monmouthshire, Wales, born in 1835. An apparently confirmed bachelor, he was to rather quickly change his estate through a play of fate. Following the destructive tornado which swept through the town of Primrose May 23, 1878, but a fortnight after the millpond drownings, Mr. Jones organized a relief committee to bring relief to the storm victims. Among others upon whom he called was the widow, Ellen Sweet Donald, who had been left a widow within a year after her marriage in 1868. One upshot of this episode was the marriage soon afterwards of Mr. Jones and Mrs. Donald, whereupon Ike Brader the younger wag-gishly observed that it took a cyclone to bring John Jones, the bachelor, and the widow Donald together.

An active moiler in village affairs and its representative litigant was William W. Minor, early day shoe merchant, who was to enlist in the Civil war comparatively late in life, but in time to lose a leg at the Wilderness and thus make him Mt. Vernon's symbol of that conflict. Just before the war he bore an active hand in the expulsion of the Byams. In his later years he built a picturesque home somewhat on the order of a miniature Greek villa and still one of the features of Mt. Vernon architecture.

Next he brought suit to have the Primrose road running between this home and the river removed to the higher ground back of his house on the claim that pioneer travel had followed this higher route and fixed it by usage as the original road. In a long court trial—fortunately for the public—he was to lose his suit. An interesting historical by-product came about through the calling of many pioneers of the region who testified as to their years of arrival, with other valuable data.

About half way between Mt. Vernon and Verona lived a generation ago one of the famous men of western Dane, James P.



McPherson. He came from Scotland in 1850 and having some education and a predilection for politics, he quickly became a leader in town affairs. He was elected to the town board and in 1854 was appointed one of the first superintendents of the poor in Dane county. In 1858—only eight years after his arrival—he was elected county clerk of Dane county and three years afterwards was made chairman of the county board, as he was again in 1870. Also as early as 1856 he was appointed postmaster at the so-called Springdale postoffice which was his own house and past which the stage between Madison and Mt. Vernon made weekly trips. Mr. McPherson was also town clerk and school district clerk for years and the nearby schoolhouse was early given the name of the McPherson school. However, it was as justice of the peace that McPherson shone with a glory all his own and earned a temporary immortality. For many years he dispensed much of the justice of a large part of western Dane county and were his old dockets written up they would reveal many a tale of farmer quarrels, dance hall fights, horse trading and more sordid things that would make many a day's interesting reading. Many of the simple-minded Norwegian settlers of the region looked to him as their guardian and protector when anyone tried to defraud or harm them.

In the Mt. Vernon cemetery overlooking the town from a hillside on the Madison road the rude forefathers of the village sleep, the Bradens, Hales, Allens, Minors, Chandlers, Lewises and others. Here too rest many pioneer men and women from the surrounding countryside, the Pierces, Shumways, Foyes, Harkers, Ways, Webbers. Rude only in the poet's sense of leading and living unobtrusive lives, there were many remarkable people among them, offshoots of pioneer stocks from Maine, New York, Ohio, Indiana and the south; men and women with much native culture behind them; who could furnish entertainment on occasion; who could argue well on public questions, and who could meet situations and crises with resourcefulness and courageous self-reliance. Their names call to mind that backwoods type of Americanism now gone, with which we associate sturdy independence, openhearted hospitality, clean living and genuine manhood. Their wants being few, they were correspondingly free and we love to think of them taking down their trusty shotguns and supplying their own wants without paying tribute to anyone in so doing. What rare unwritten tales—thought commonplace then, but which would seem marvelous now—were often buried with them! Peace to their ashes! With them the golden age of Mt. Vernon passed—its story and theirs an example in miniature of the way of many larger communities, states and nations.

A fine state highway now runs through the village of Mt. Vernon, connecting with the more populous villages of Mt. Horeb to the north and Belleville to the south. Tourists speeding through the quaint little hamlet remark upon its natural beauties, but give it no further thought, . . . . . and Mt. Vernon dreams on.

